

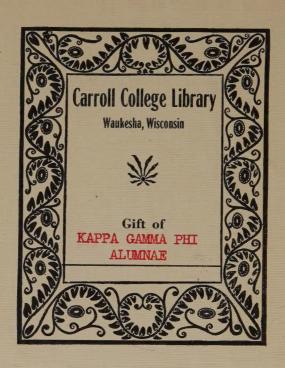
IF THERE IS TIME

Poems by

HILDEGARDE FLANNER











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IF THERE IS TIME · Poems by HILDEGARDE FLANNER

C THE POET OF THE MONTH



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(Below Mt. Wilson Observatory)

O LOVELY wheel that weds along the groove And wedless parts the shimmer of your rim To silver singly in the tempered air, You, slow as God, have overtaken Him.

O pale perimeter of grace, anointed For that hypnotic glide impinged on might, Who forged you on the anvil of the stars And set you turning to the laws of light?

How cryptic is the calm, the intricate Unindolence of power that knows its place, So gravely balanced between pole and pole, So local in the mystery of space.

Time is a solid here, co-bound and wrought With matter's destiny. Tell, who can tell How period is lapped in pause of steel, How truth is made to fit itself so well?

Sun, when it shines on traffic, has a look Of loaded radiance that might explode, Yet keeps its kindle like a meaning known Only to motors in the city road,

Only to fury lifted of all horns Mourning to themselves a thing to come, For we have heard delirium in a claxon, Seen revelation lit on chromium.

On Alameda Street the earth is turning Secret among old sluices and their kind: The voice of men among machines at noon Comes like a sigh from history to the mind,

For in this noon there is no light like light, (Oh, tell us, dark on asphalt, of the sun) But brightness spawning upon dirty glass, But fever smoking at meridian,

But men and women riding in their graves With hands upon a wheel they cannot keep Clear in the rapt confusion of the crowd, Crowd and the fate of motion and of sleep.

(SLOW BOONE

CALL it our land, our valleys, but not ours
Got by our fathers' guns and Paiutes slain,
Until a slower haste of continent
Wins twice to west across the brimming plain.

O quick compatriots, now is the need To reap a secret in the acre sealed Untouched by prairie rage or primitive. Say truth is deeper than the battlefield.

Say all sure things that frenzy overtakes
Win to the greenest goal by their own powers.
Say patience like the burning of a rock
Turns passion, then will the land be ours.

Then will the native heart be cleared for use, The horny miles run inward to the mind And the blood's visionary length at last Be in the poet's actual vein refined.

His then a continent to sensitize,
His the blue land not plowed by pioneers,
His the last newcoming the plains will know,
A slow Boone quietly fingering frontiers.

PRAYER FOR THIS DAY

Here, west of winter, lies the ample flower
Along a bough not builded on by snow.
Now earth conceives the bridal and the bower.
Now what was rain is vistas in a row
Of spring, or miles of water knocking upon stone.
The random green heals over without flaw,
Hills heave a bright front to the midmost sun.
Oh, what are we to say that worlds are lost
Or what bears heaviest on the heart almost?

Still to a century superb for death
The emerald shrub again, the rose undwindled,
Still quail are whistling with a bubble's breath
And lean and tender lilies taper still,
Still satin moths at night with great eyes kindled
Throb into flame. If there is time to will
Prayer from a heart too long by reason fondled,
Then here where flinty branches loosen into white,
Here at the balmy side of spring's re-birth
Kneel down. We ask no vision, no heavenly light,
But simple faith, like faith of grass, in earth,
And seed's old dream against the night, the night.

© OF OLD SAT FREEDOM ON THE HEIGHTS?

Not she. Not Freedom.

Never sublime and near the roaring stars.

Never caught pleated in museum stone.

She has the hero's eyes, the queenly spine,

Yet never poised her profile on a throne.

She proved herself of old, and still she does, Sharp in the dirty bargains of despair: And takes no chariots to great events But goes on foot, and is not welcome there.

Calm when the cradle of our hope cries loud, It is crescendo calm, that's history, Till healing sweeps her sound on every sense, A whisper, but the kind that drowns the sea.

Yet never conceive her as the warm consoler, Baring her sterling bosoms for the crowd: It takes a thinking man to reach her lap, While all the feeble millions thirst aloud.

C LET US BELIEVE

LET us believe in the flesh, the hope made flesh, For the soul is an exile without rest. And the brain is a pack of apes in flight, And the heart of the world is breaking in every breast. Let us honor the flesh with faith extreme. See, on this vicious day, how the brave blood, How the frail racial bone, the mysterious marrow Would fill with life the rotten sons of God. Though death has overrun our desperate walls And panic has us in a corner, cold, Do hope, do cling: by the great atom, by the cell, By the black centuries already old, By the bright skull hid in the living face, By the five-pointed magic of the hand, Flesh, that pale prophet that survives all fates, Will, if it matters, make a more human race.

€ 12 O'CLOCK FREIGHT

Away, four miles, I heard the Santa Fe Go down the track, and I could see the sight, A freighter pulling out with cryptic cars, So sealed and sullen in the flowered night.

At home and in my mind I saw her draw Her secrets where black fences line the rail, And choking orange groves abandoned to No rain and flaky pestilence of scale.

And then by palmy drives and boulevards Where stucco gleams beside the carob-tree, And Spanish patios in vain enclose Lone hearts from Iowa and Kankakee.

And past Anita's wealthy meadows where Her smouldering pea-cocks doze among her hounds With sapphire laces folded in the dark That daily trail and twitch about the grounds.

On by the oaks whose forest stoops upon The listing hills where once the drift of deer Drew down with winter's waters green, A herd of dreams in glassy atmosphere. Here comes, she comes, here comes the glooming train Flying her bloody smoke. People in bed Rouse halfway, and made lonely at the sound Touch hands and touch their hands to a dear head.

And tell me, night, the names of all the men Who ride the freight train, stretched upon the cars, Heavy and motherless and rockasleep, Their hungry faces pointed at the stars.

What destiny, dark suburb, what asylum Of rot will they slip off into at last, When on the final freighter, oh caboose, The ruby jerk and leer of light go past?

Into the valley, long San Gabriel,
The train crawls bleak and moaning down the track,
And from the rail the starlight spurts again
With sudden gush of brightness after black.

■ POEM

AT least and still at lingering last we can Console ourselves because this earth is ours, Though we could never hurl the hurricane, Nor weld a hill, nor soft unlock the showers, Nor rivet the diamond under the abyss, Nor add the desert up, nor crumble the frost Over the flower's face. Remembering this The warm security of pride is lost, For we are dull mismasters of a huge event And cannot think who tutored us to fail, We ruin so quick, and hope is nearly spent; But faint at intervals, benign and frail A courage whispers, just this side of fate, Cling earthward, inward, do not abdicate!

O MOTOR, MOTORS, o intuitive steel, My source is sober earth, and yet I claim Elliptic nature with the moonlike wheel And metal introverted in your name. With you, o summoned and ascended matter, The brain is beautified and full of poise, But leaves a woman's heart, the unforgetter, To shake the flesh with an old human noise, To recollect, and very like despair, Your endless excellence is far too great For all my clamorous kind whose mind will bear Only perfection's print and not its weight. Yet, mystical and motor, yet I burn, A fool to be your close of kin, to feel -If only once what many never learn-The heavenly wholeness of the smallest wheel.

© BEFORE ANAESTHESIA

OH, what a morning, my mysterious flesh,
When you and I together drift on lakes
Of sleep unearthly, and these very white
White masked creatures, gentle for our sakes,
Lay us to slumber in such perfect light.
Be rapt, you flesh, for this most hour of hours
When down! the knife shall down and you not shrink,
When every agony cry to the brain
But that deep blissful cell refuse to think,
While you, my flesh, serene at the abyss
Bask here, and shall rise up with all your breath,
And brightened body grown half mystical
From this the strangest, oh most strange of all
Life's victories over her late lord death.

WEDDING

HERE comes, with fresh and flaxen lilies And stately step that still is faint, the bride. O crest of, drift of, single of sweeping white And little breast of snow-flake over pearl! With dedicated pallor and large eyes Slow to the ferny altar moves a girl.

How sheer the moment is. Two musics float From note to note. It is not earth we hear Singing so near to far, so scarcely heard, Nor zones of heaven ringing at our side. It is nor prayer nor blessing-bell nor even Her mother's heart just breaking for the bride.

It is (very mortal music and austere)
The entreated spirit tossing in the flesh
And that so soft on-tingle rapt to hear it.
It is the body beaten on by bliss,
Stroke, stroke of solo sweetness teased in two,
Resolved at final pulse into one kiss.

C LETTER TO AN OLD HOME

You'LL surely tell me if the whip-poor-will Still whets his beak at dusk, rips out a song? How I remember in the tremulous Old woods the uncanny tongue so wild and strong. That bird can sing a most devouring note, Can sing you clean without a pause for grace, Leave only your cold mortal marrow somehow And the white hark of a startled face, Yes, and your dry throat gritty on your breath: And though you quake, the makings of a smile Show at your mouth, your slowly open mouth, To hear him crying in that ravenous style. I never was so fed upon by music As when, a chilly child in the large night, That song sprang on me from a fence corner, And sucked my being out in hard delight. The cry soared into me, and how I shook, Not spoke, not wept, not ran from that shrill ground, But rattled in my sandals and consumed Under the eerie passion of that sound. Time cannot resurrect nor would I wish Ever to lose the dying I took alive When hungry revelation ate me up But missed a morsel, panting to survive.

© SMITH BROTHERS' LUMBER SHED

HERE in the shadow of the Smiths, my forest, The flower of Oregon is straight and dead, The pine that whistled and the cedar's harp, A silent lumber counted in a shed. So many miles, so many winds between This corner south, your sable forest north, Where loud you rolled your branches on the storm, Slow begot new green, slow brought it forth. O Mr. Smith, O Oregon, I saw All that you both possess under one shed, The earth profoundly holding up her trees, And every man, a home upon his head. And more, believe, I saw and counted most The northern stars still trembling through the branch And far below, the pale glass of a flower, And I forebore to pick it up so blanche. It is for Mr. Smith, he must be laid Sometimes limpid among lengths of lumber, Heaving his eye up to remembered shade, Hearing the lovely voice of living timber, And see—it's natural, not as a Smith possessed— His fir-trees drinking at the snow's fine breast.

€ SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE SUBURBS

As if the sun were shining on the bias
The light of this day falls and will not fill.
There is a central emptiness, a cerebral hollow
Not brimmed by doses biblical.

Increase of virtue in a vacuum:
Flutter of moth brushed out of the best coat:
And down the Sabbath slant of time
Particles of Saturday's dust float.

Cold gravy put away in a blue bowl Of willow pattern: a dynasty in grease: Double damask shaken free of pie crumbs, Three feet of snow and a clean crease.

Pink tots delivered of beatitudes Teeter in new leather on the front curb: Elders on plush de luxe digesting dinner Chew absently the cud of Israel's herb.

© SWIFT LOVE, SWEET MOTOR

And will they always be so tender, her Face a kind of star to burn him up, she Nearly there and wholly tremulous, his lap? Where ecstacy lolls unabashed, his knee?

Will always run the road under the wheels, The kiss of tire to boulevard complete, The fuels of joy and speed flow brightly, make Sunday combust in a miraculous heat?

Will ever just this perilous hot way
Survive to make them almost crash in bliss,
Just missing (where old panic licks his grin)
Black flowers and funerals of the abyss?

Question to question: and no answer mine.

Love rides locked to love whose motors pass

Leaving upon my traffic eye one token,

A gleam at fifty miles through shatterproof glass,

Her smile, a little honey-comb just broken.

You, the illimitable vista and the divided dot, And shall you give salvation and repose? Circles of sight collapsing up the air, And can you draw me safely home through those?

Infinitesimal, but not concealed So deep but I can deeper lean: As much cerulean this way as above, Whole atoms with a firmament between.

That strain to plumb the swimming fire of stars, That trembling push to stare through the opaque Give me (a spectral dwarf) a glimmering inch, Grown that much taller, matter, for your sake.

C HAWK IS A WOMAN

I saw a hawk devour a screaming bird, Devour the little ounce sugared with song. First bent and ate the pretty eyes both out, One eye and twice, stooping to taste the pang. Then her dripping tongue she cleaned, then Into the winsome breast she plied her beak, Took at a gulp the rosy heart, a pinch Of too great innocence, drank the whole lark Down, the inmost blood down, licked the lark down With vicious dainty pick, oh the damned thief! To break! into the beating bird! and tear The veins out, out the joy, flesh out of life. May hawk be hawked upon, I say, May she be spied and nailed upon the ground And feel herself divided and devoured To ease the gullet of some casual fiend. She, she! before her agony lapse quite, Before her breast is eaten to her back, May she, the very she, may that hawk hear The ugly female laughter of a hawk.

C THE FLIGHT

- Now I was running in the gaunt twilight and the stones were sheer, my feet left blood there.
- A rabbit leaped beside me, tore away like flame, I screamed.
- From the old cliff the soft owls fled. I ran, I heard their scooping wings, I, running
- Heard their female voices lapped in lust, I ran, the jut of lava
- From a cold volcano caught me running, I fell blank, rose running
- Saw the stripped moon let light into the desert, ran by lack of light, came
- Where starving in his ribs coyote ate sour meat with sand, cried brother, I cried brother, ran ran ran
- Into the idle shock of night, the loathe of dark, touched hell, cried out, ran and
- Drank my own blood to keep alive, cried cried your name that had no help, no help, fell, fell at last
- Beside the gone, the ghost of waters, the dammed alkali, death's joke: but saw, just saw
- As if I still had eyes, the quivering of the dawn.

Doe will die red, she will be killed some night,
Doe will scream out, weep red, and the ferns bleed
Deer's blood and the pink bubbles float
Light on the lovely waters of the pool.
Bearing no hot horn for defense, the doe must bleed
(Being gentle meat, being the mountain's fool)
Her life away, and on her tragic flesh
Her enemy eat brutal until dawn.
Thus the wailing doe. Thus the riding lion,
Fiend on the soft loin of the wailing doe.
Never ask why, between dark hunger
And the last bloody sob of terror poured
On dust, never ask why this thing is so.
Always the fetid fury of the lion,
Always the lost, on-lilies-feeding doe.

How soft the serpent lies there in her rings And dozes poisonous, without alarm. She cuddles in the sand and loves herself And, dreaming, sucks her venom without harm. I hate her so. Good God. I hate her so. Look, how she soothes and pours herself around And nudges with her swollen cheek at rocks That cannot leap in loathing or in sound. She is all flesh and finished in one flesh And needs no other things to practise lust. Base unity, her sluicing creep is ever A cold persistent nuptial with the dust. I hate her. Round and round I hate her who Opens her mouth into a vipersmile And flies her scaly omens at her end, Giving to death his dying and his style.

LAVA HAS MEANING

Here lies an ancient, that black rock
Fierce thing so black, black lava sere.
It burns my brain to think the awful shock
Of fire on fundament. Thus it got here.
Thus mountains boiled and liquid altitude
Roared running red, earth's fused earth at the skies
Loud lunged, and valleys in their hot laps brewed
The huge fume like a burning brute. Here lies,
From some old fainted fiery night long gone,
Fraught likeness to this hour, these agonies.
For after havoc, staggering through his chilled
Terrors extinct and black things left in view,
Man has like sable ground to tread upon,
Yet cries (what matter, wild master, could not do)
Cries to his morbid stones, Stand up, and build!

€ THE BUCK

HEARD him from the cliff where the fern dripped, Faint, deep, he's calling to the doe. Heard, where the brook ran cold and subtle Straight from icy vitals of the snow. Heard him from the trail where summer smells So soft, and the large air is brightened balm, Voice like blunt horns in caverns blown, the buck, In granite silence and cliffglittering calm. Bell bell that rings in middle of a rock, His cry of green wood lifted hot and dense, Till forest feels it in the least, the leaf, A murmurous knowledge out of sun and sense. Rumor rolled on mountain wind, heard heard From far in wood's black glamour and the place Witness to such wild beatitude And the clear startle of Sierran grace. Somewhere, sheer hope assured, by snow's white side And the bright dangle of dewed glacier lilies, Desire does overtake its own at last, Blithe among cedar slopes the running bride: Not desperate disunion gaunt on stone, Not the chilled heart left louder and alone.

THIGH STREAM'S END

A PLACE is lost and ghosted that I knew.
There was a brook, and a nemoral the shade
Where shadow stroked the dappled side of light,
And where the ouzel plunged, that brown mermaid.

It was a canyon, and the winterwater From grooves of mountain snow did straight descend, An emerald alley in the wilderness With pillar of fluted water at the end.

And bronze eventual the leopard lily
Or mother-of-gold her light pagoda built,
And stealthy hung her spotted banner out,
A secret queen upon precarious gilt—

For now with hardly whither! all has vanished And where, in summer's mania, none can tell. The lily's court is dust, alone remains The quail, a delirious jester without a bell.

Waking, turning, saw the unlit hill, Felt that valley Indian, without sound: How bodies, man and beast, still still Lay sleeping: and sleep lay in the ground.

Felt that hill austere in finish of night, Night that dwindles purpose to repose, And piles up dreams in languor upon sight, Unsenses every sense and fondles those.

But waking, turning, saw one hill intense And kneeling on the sky for dawn: saw how The flaky morning star, white and immense, Shook scales of blazing mica on that brow.





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THE POET OF THE MONTH

[1] WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: The Broken Span. The Norman Press, Chicago. [2] JOHN DONNE: Some Poems & A Devotion. The Merrymount Press, Boston. [3] HARRY BROWN: The End of a Decade. The Harbor Press, New York. [4] HOWARD BAKER: A Letter from the Country. Hawthorn House, Windham, Connecticut. [5] THEODORE SPENCER: The Paradox in the Circle. The Prairie Press, Iowa. [6] JOHN WHEELWRIGHT: Selected Poems. The Golden Eagle Press, Mount Vernon, New York. [7] JOSEPHINE MILES: Poems on Several Occasions. Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles, California. [8] DELMORE SCHWARTZ: Shenandoah. A verse play. Illustrated by Federico Castellon. The Domesday Press, New York. [9] DUDLEY FITTS: More Poems from The Palatine Anthology. Translations from the Greek. The Walpole Printing Office, Mount Vernon, New York. [10] F. T. PRINCE: Poems. Samuel Marcus Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. [11] RAINER MARIA RILKE: The Book of Hours. Translated by Babette Deutsch. The Peter Pauper Press, Mount Vernon, New York. [12] MALCOLM COWLEY: The Dry Season. The Fine Editions Press, New York. These are the twelve booklets which were published in The Poet of the Month Series during 1941.

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